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ABSTRACT

The fourth in a set of five publications on the educational "ministry," this booklet focuses on Catholic parents sharing their religious faith with their children. This resource booklet offers tools to elementary school and parish leaders. An explanation of Christian Family Clusters (groups of four to six families formed at the grass-roots level and with mutual concern for the good of each other) is accompanied by guides for six cluster sessions. A brief article, "Parent as Witness," by Dr. Richard Corrado, suggests some of the many qualities of parental witnessing. Also included in the booklet are ideas and activities for building home-school communication; a parental recommitment service for use within a Catholic school setting; a ready-to-adapt and/or reproduce brochure designed for distribution to parents; and other reproducible art for custom designing materials related to the parent as witness concept. (MLF)

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EA 017 137

A resource book for Catholic elementary schools and parishes with
major focus on
Christian Family Clusters

PARENT
AS
WITNESS

Prepared by the
Department of Elementary Schools Executive Committee
National Catholic Educational Association

"Christian Family Clusters"
by Sr. Maria de la Cruz Aymes, SH

"Parent as Witness"
by Dr. Richard Corrado

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The Christian Family Cluster approach has been clearly and succinctly explained by someone known well to Catholic religious educators, Sr. Maria de la Cruz Aymes, SH. We express our deep gratitude to her for developing this important component.

The Elementary Schools Department wishes to thank Dr. Richard Corrado for addressing the 1981 NCEA Convention on the topic, "Parent as Witness," and for contributing his parent-educator views to this publication.

Terry Davis, SND, designed the Parent as Witness logo, and Sr. Michon Welsh, OSF, penned the cover for the parent brochure. All Scriptural passages are from the *New American Bible*.

Daily we are reminded that many parents and educators contribute their time and service to Catholic education. *Parent as Witness* offers one more example of that generosity.

Sr. Mary John Kearney, OP
President

Sr. Carleen Reck, SSND
Executive Director

Department of Elementary Schools
National Catholic Educational Association

I. INTRODUCTION

Principal as Prophet
Teacher as Minister
Student as Disciple
Parent as Witness

The fourth of a series, *Parent as Witness*, focuses on another important aspect of the educational ministry. In fact, parental witness serves as a basis for all other efforts within Catholic education.

The concept of parent as witness is one which expresses the parental call to share Christian life with their children. The future of the Church lies in the homes of today's children—in the hands of their parents. Children receive the message of the Gospel as parents communicate it through their daily lives.

Parents witness to their children when they share with them the experience of their faith—how it has given them life filled with hope and peace. Within this faith life, children grow also as they share the sorrows and disappointments of their parents. They need to know what God means personally to their parent or parents.

The goal of the Catholic school is to enhance what a child has already received at home. The school tries to build on the faith experiences that children bring with them. Together the home and school can bring children to the realization that Jesus Christ is the Person who really counts in their lives.

This resource booklet offers several tools to elementary school and parish leaders:

- an explanation of Christian Family Clusters, an effective structure to initiate parent-to-parent ministry.
- guides for six cluster sessions, based on themes related to proven family strengths. If local conditions make home clustering impossible, the materials can be adapted to small groups during home-school gatherings.
- an article, written by a parent-educator, which suggests some of the many qualities of parental witnessing. The article may be reproduced (as a whole or in sections) for distribution to parents and/or selections may form a script for a local slide presentation.
- ideas and activities for building home-school communication.
- a parental recommitment service for use within a Catholic school setting.
- a ready-to-adapt and/or reproduce brochure designed for distribution to parents.
- other repro-art for custom designing materials related to the Parent as Witness concept.

The elements may be combined in whatever way best fits the local interests, needs, and calendar. A small committee of parents and educators should study available components and design an appropriate plan. The following is one example of such a local plan:

September-The home school meeting introduces the concept of Parent as Witness using one or more of the following:

- local slides and background music accompany a slow reflective reading of "Parent as Witness," printed on the parent brochure, or some thoughts from Dr. Richard Corrado's article.
- a panel of parents share what they believe contributes most and least to effective witness.
- letters, written by children to their parents, are read (without using names). The letters are honest answers to a question such as, "How can I, your parent, best show you my Christian values?"
- distribution of the parent brochure and/or Dr. Corrado's article.

November-The home school meeting introduces the Christian Family Cluster concept. Participants—identified at the meeting and through a take-home brochure—are formed into clusters, using the suggested procedures.

December-The children pray for each family, using #16 of "Home-School Communication—Ideas and Activities."

January through April-Reminders of the Parent as Witness concept are frequently included in parent newsletters. Parents meet for three cluster sessions. After the first three, participants indicate their interest to continue cluster meetings during the coming year.

May-A Recommitment Service is planned for all cluster participants. After the service, a social hour will provide an informal opportunity to exchange responses to the Christian Family Clusters.

This is one plan. The possibilities depend only on the degree of interest and imagination. This publication is offered as an initial tool to develop the Parent as Witness concept.

II. CHRISTIAN FAMILY CLUSTERS

by Sr. Maria de la Cruz Aymes, S.H.

Rationale and Description

Take a thread. Pull it hard. It will snap.
Twist together many threads. Pull them hard. They will resist.

Look at a single flower. It is beautiful.
Combine it with other flowers, leaves, even a small branch.
Its beauty will be enhanced.

Watch a rivulet. It meekly follows the roughness of the ground.
Let other streams join it. They will reshape the ground.

Images abound. But the truth behind them is the same and applies to us: a single individual has strength, unique value, and can bring about change. But together in a group, our insights and combined strength can create a better world around us. When any group of Christian people join to form a community, together they are better able to build up the Church. By joining others we join Christ. And in Him we "can do all things." (Philippians 4:13)

The same truth and principle also applies to families. Parents alone can do many things. But the complexity of life today, the diversity of problems, the conflicting values demanding attention, the pressures that come from all sides and in all forms threaten to crush parents or at least diminish their potentials to face them in a creative way. But when parents unite with a few other parents who are living in similar circumstances, they are better able to see the situation more clearly, to find alternative solutions, and to reshape their world—instead of being crushed by it.

Sometimes these parents meet with their children's teachers to share insights and offer mutual encouragement to one another as they explore answers to the question, "How can we best help ourselves and our children to become better persons and more responsible Christians?"

This mutual collaboration has given rise to valuable parents' programs in many parochial schools and religious education programs. It is good, however, to evaluate these programs periodically to see if they are fulfilling the expectations of the parents and teachers, and have developed their maximum potential. It is also important to be aware of their limitations.

For example: some parent groups are almost exclusively task oriented. Their purpose is determined by a specific need or school activity. These are excellent for parents who want this type of concrete and limited involvement. But such groups will not interest everyone.

Large parents' groups give a sense of achievement to everyone. It is rewarding to belong to an organization where there is strength and vitality. Sheer numbers can give a sense of pride. But this kind of group cannot fulfill all needs, nor does it open unlimited possibilities for

personal enrichment and Christian growth to parents and members of their family.

Many parents feel overpowered by large numbers. They are "anonymous" members and feel incapable of contributing to their full capacity to the growth of the group. In such large numbers it is difficult for the pastor, director of religious education (DRE), principal and other faculty members to see the variants and complexities in the situation of families which at first glance may seem to fit the same "category." Not all "single-parent" families face the same kind of stress. Not all "minority families" endure the same handicaps. Not all "average Catholic families" are equally "average." General categories are inevitable in large organizations, but to truly get to know persons and enable them to feel they belong and are respected for who they are, smaller groups are indispensable.

A large group—consisting of parents of different ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds—can touch only the surface of parental concerns and be enriched by only a few of their personal potentials. Their hierarchy of values will differ, the language to express their hopes or fears or concerns will carry different connotations The means to achieve a common goal may vary enormously from family to family within the same parish.

There may be areas of fear, resentment, tension, and even oppressive working conditions and dire poverty in some families which will not surface in large groups, or even in a face to face meeting with the pastor, principal, DRE, or teacher. There is often lack of time and of understanding to detect the full extent of concern when a parents asks, "How is Johnny doing in class?" or "How can I help my daughter get better grades?" Possibly the concern with "grades" hides deeper troubles like a lack of communication at home, exaggerated stress on achievement, deep-seated competitiveness, a demanding and disciplinarian parent, a child using drugs and neglecting studies, parental inability to recognize the child's limitations and/or true potentials. Counselling and personal interviews do help to clarify the issues, but alternative solutions are limited because the number of persons involved in searching for them is also limited.

Without eliminating existing organizations and channels of dialogue and counselling, every parish should be sensitive to the additional needs of parents and their families. We all know by personal experience that in large gatherings we put up "a front" and that in personal interviews which can't be avoided we often mask our true feelings. To open up, we must sometimes be helped to formulate our own questions; we must feel that others who share similar situations are also searching for viable solutions.

We need time; we need trust. We need to talk with people who share our concern and are interested in our values and problems because, in fact, they also experience them in their own family life. We have to find people with whom we can form "community"—not just any people, not just other parents and families, but those who are the closest to us in their experience and who share many of the same values, problems, and possibilities—people who will understand what we are saying because they speak the same language.

We need to form *small clusters* of *Christian families.*

What are these Clusters of Christian Families?

Christian Family Clusters are not the same as the Christian Family Movement which has a well established structure. They are not like parents' groups related to school and/or parish activities. Nor are they discussion or charismatic prayer groups. They are not necessarily Basic Christian Communities either, although they could easily evolve into them.

Christian Family Clusters share many basic principles of the above-mentioned organizations, but they have a dynamic of their own. They are formed at the grass-root level, with a minimal structure and for an indefinite duration. Though oriented primarily to parents who want to give witness of their faith, Christian Family Clusters are open to any member of the family who can participate, including teenagers and children.

Every Cluster has a life of its own and can evolve in any way its members find helpful. It has the freedom to get started and the freedom to stop. Each group sets its own pace, the frequency, duration, and extent of its meetings. Members are accountable to themselves, yet realize that, like any Church group, they should keep the pastor, DRE, and/or principal informed of their existence. They could also share with them some of their key concerns, questions, insights, or problems. This is not to be considered as "giving an account," but as a friendly sharing.

Only the families who form the Cluster can evaluate whether or not their efforts have been worthwhile. An "outsider" is unable to pass judgment or label a Cluster as better, worse, or more successful than others. This important aspect characterizes Christian Family Clusters. They must feel free of restrictive structures that impose meaningless obligations. They are responsible to find their own ways to grow in maturity and mutual concern for the good of each other. Each Cluster is to identify the needs of members, set priorities and goals, and determine its own boundaries, so that it does not become a burden to the families.

Aim of Christian Family Clusters

Christian Family Clusters aim

1. to open new possibilities for parents to help one another within small gatherings
2. to deepen members' own faith and give witness to it
3. to find new ways of creating a Christian environment at home
4. to give mutual support in the Christian education of their children
5. to stimulate in themselves and in their children genuine growth in human and Christian maturity

Formation of Christian Family Clusters

CFC can be formed in different ways:

1. by *areas* - families living in the same neighborhood
2. by *ethnic groups* - parents of the same cultural background
3. by *religious interest* - parents whose children are preparing for the celebration of the same sacrament: Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, or Matrimony
4. by *social concerns* - families working under the same economic pressures or sharing the same concerns
5. by *special situations* - single-parent families, divorced parents, mixed marriages, parents of disabled children, etc.

Structure and Procedures for Meetings

Basic Structure of Christian Family Clusters

1. Four to six families meet periodically, beginning with a minimum of three sessions, preferably during three consecutive weeks. At the conclusion of these meetings, they decide whether or not they want to continue for three more meetings.
2. They meet in the home of the "Host Family," rotating this role among the families.
3. The Host Family chairs the meeting; a different "parent-leader" should be appointed for each Cluster meeting—to begin, direct, and end the meeting.
4. The meeting is primarily for parents. Older children and other family members should not be excluded, however, if the parents decide they can contribute to the sharing.
5. The meeting should not last more than two hours from arrival to departure.
6. The parish or school provides the outline of six basic themes to be discussed. The Clusters are free to select those they want to use. Depending on the interest in the topic, a specific discussion might be extended into the second or third meeting; in other words, the Clusters should not feel obligated to discuss one topic per meeting.
7. Ideally the parish or school should provide a basic communication skills presentation for the parents interested in forming a Cluster. Any help in group dynamics will facilitate their meetings. If a preliminary, general presentation is not possible, the parents should be given some simple guidelines and suggestions concerning how their meetings could be conducted. (See following sections.)

Requirements to Belong to a Cluster

Members should take these initial steps:

1. Select and sign up for a Cluster (or volunteer to get one started).
2. Promise to attend the basic three meetings. (It demoralizes others if some parents are not consistent in attending the meetings.)
3. Plan to be on time. (Everybody will appreciate it.)
4. Bring a notebook and a pencil. (They will be helpful to you.) Although Scripture references are printed within the meeting materials, members should be encouraged to bring and to use their own Bibles.
5. Read in advance the topic to be discussed. (Be ready with your comments and/or questions. This will keep the discussion going.)
6. Be aware that things might move slowly and awkwardly at the first meeting; it takes time to feel at ease with each other. (Be patient with yourself and with others.)
7. Keep in mind that "results" are not necessarily visible. The value we seek is to "gather together in Jesus' Name"; He will do the rest if we are open to His Spirit.

Suggested Procedure for the Actual Meetings

Although these procedures are flexible, they offer a basic framework for sessions:

Home Preparation

1. *The Host Family welcomes* the members of the cluster, makes them comfortable, and gets the meeting started promptly at the time agreed upon with the initial *Communication Experience*, (as indicated in the pages which follow this article). This first stage of the meeting is very important for several reasons: it serves as an ice-breaker; it will give a joyful and friendly note to the gathering; but, even more important, it will help to base the discussion on personal experiences, not just on theories. Ten to twenty minutes can profitably be given to this communication-experience. It should not be omitted under the excuse that "there is no time."

Prayer

2. Proceed with a short *Scripture reading*. Follow with a brief silent reflection. It is essential that the sharing take place in an environment of prayer, with an awareness that the Lord is present within the group.

Dialogue

3. Open the *dialogue* on the theme by asking each one to recall personal experiences related to the topic.

   Discuss why this topic has importance or a special meaning in the participants' own personal lives and in the lives of their families.

   As the sharing of experiences, problems and insights proceeds, other questions will surely arise. If they are not related to the central theme, record them on a large sheet of paper, visible to all, so they will not be ignored or forgotten. They could be discussed at another meeting if, of course, the other members of the group agree.

   It may be that a question has importance and urgency for at least one of the families. It could deal with an emergency, a run-away child, a crisis, a sudden death—how does a family deal with it? how does a parent explain it to a younger child? The group has to be sensitive to the needs of its members. The key purpose of the meetings is not to discuss "topics," but to *create community*.

Action

4. *Draw conclusions and resolutions*. This does not mean "agreements." In fact, during the meeting there may have been disagreement, tension, even conflict; this is not necessarily negative. It should be very beneficial to the Cluster members to realize that not everyone sees things the same way and that there are different ways of dealing with the same situation or problem. This tends to open horizons and helps participants be more understanding of those who do not agree with them. It is, however, useful to clarify where the group is in regard to the topic discussed: to make some concrete statements about it; to indicate the suggested ways of dealing with it; to list the measures taken as individuals and/or as a group, to clarify the plan of action for the future.

   If there are basic disagreements, or if fundamental questions arise which no one in the group can answer, the Cluster may want to present the question and/or problem to another Cluster of parents in their parish, to the parish priest, the principal, or to some person in the parish who might be able to answer it. Most important is that the group respectfully listens to the words of every member and responds to the concerns in some way.

Summary

5. At this point it would be helpful if the parent-leader of the meeting would briefly summarize the key thoughts or insights expressed and the conclusions reached, stressing the positive aspects and values of the topic discussed.

Evaluation

If the cluster members feel at ease with each other, they may want to *evaluate how the meeting went.* This can be done very simply. Each one could describe with one word his/her own personal reaction: "Enriching," "Delightful," "Heavy," "Challenging," etc. Or participants could state how they experienced the meeting, and what went well or wrong. For example: "It was a helpful meeting because *we* had the courage to be honest with one another." or "I found it heavy because *we* did not seem to really listen to one another."

The "we" is crucial because everyone—including the person giving the evaluation—is responsible for making the meeting a fruitful one.

Prayer

6. Read another short *Scripture passage.* Invite those present, if they so wish to share a brief prayer related to the topic that was discussed. It would help to give each other a sign of peace, of reconciliation and of friendship.

Conclusion

7. *End the meeting on time.* Be sensitive to those who may have to pay baby-sitters, who are tired, who are making a real effort to attend these meetings. Better to make them regret that the meeting has come to an end too soon and that much remains to be talked about, than to have it drag on for the sake of one person who may be enjoying the situation.

Refreshments may be served, if all the members agree that this would help. Keep these simple to avoid a need to "keep up with the Joneses" or the danger of wanting to outshine others. Sharing food is a sign of friendship; let it not become a burden.

How To Get Christian Family Clusters Started

1. Create interest and stir up curiosity about the clusters by mentioning them in the parish bulletin, in the Prayers of the Faithful at Sunday Liturgy, through school and CCD communications.

   For example, "Have you heard about the Christian Families in our parish who are forming clusters to help one another? Ask for more information." or "Do you know that belonging to a Christian Family Cluster may be an enriching experience for you and help you discover your own potential as a parent and as an educator?" or "If you are searching for new, practical, and feasible ways of improving the Christian environment in your home—and thereby make it happier and better—join a cluster of other families in the parish who are asking the same questions you are."
2. The pastor could at regular intervals explain the purpose of the CFC and encourage parents to join one or to form a new cluster with three or four other families. Offer the parents an easy way of choosing and signing up for the type of cluster they want to form; great freedom of choice should be given.
3. The pastor, principal, or DRE could send an invitation to all families in the parish to reach those who for some reason or other do not come to the parish church.
4. The school principal may want to take the initiative and suggest the possibility of these meetings to parents of the children enrolled in school and/or CCD.
5. The Parish Council and/or members of the school and religious education faculty could meet to brainstorm the best ways to interest families in the parish.

6. Encourage people to pray for this intention. Ask the children in school and/or CCD to pray so that the Family Clusters will really be helpful to their parents. Ask shut-ins, retired couples, elderly and lonely people in nursing homes to pray about this project.

   The beginning may require more than one communication and/or letter; people absorb new ideas slowly. The "unknown and untried" does not tempt very many busy parents. They will think of this as "another meeting," another "program," an added burden. Not all parents will respond; not all families will be interested; not all interested families will succeed in forming clusters. Trial and error will guide new directions. If at first you fail, try again in a few months.

Hints to Develop Communication Skills

Even though many parents forming a cluster may have already had some training or experience in group dynamics, it is always safer not to take that for granted. A simple way to clear obstacles and make meetings more profitable and enjoyable is to provide each member with a copy of some essential pointers to facilitate dialogue. What follows is simply by way of example. Each parish and/or school has its own special needs and characteristics which will have to be considered in preparing guidelines for dialogue.

Obstacles To Dialogue

Nothing is lost by pointing out the usual obstacles to dialogue. It is better to have these listed as "prevention" than wait until the cluster is in need of a "cure." Some examples follow:

- Individual members of the cluster can go to extremes, being either too talkative or too silent; both extremes can be a sign of insecurity and fear.
- There are some who out of human respect or distrust will not be honest in their opinions; they will try to cover up their real feelings or their ignorance of the topic being discussed by going on tangents.
- Closed-mindedness, interruptions, intolerance of opposite opinions, misunderstandings, defensiveness are quite possible in any group, no matter how professional its members might be. It is important to accept beforehand the fact that all of us share to some degree in the same weaknesses and that, therefore, we should be watchful over our own behavior.

The above list of obstacles to dialogue is by no means exhaustive. The members of the cluster may want to add to it at the initial meeting by light-heartedly exposing a "pet peeve" or weakness. For instance, "When we are talking together in a group, *a thing I can't stand is . . . .*" or "In discussing a topic I know little about, *I have the habit of . . . .*", etc.

The Values of a Good Dialogue

Having taken care of the "obstacles" to sharing ideas, it is important to point out and stress the values of dialogue. Once again the members of the cluster should indicate what values they see. Get them started by listing a few, for example:

- Dialogue brings a shared vision by opening new horizons, clarifying issues, offering new insights into family situations, and finding solutions to problems.
- Dialogue helps to build up community; it helps to understand and to be understood.
- Dialogue gives a sense of belonging, of not being alone to face problems and tensions. New solutions are found; values and positive aspects of a situation are discovered, resulting in positive thinking and leading to courageous acting. "We are not alone."
- Dialogue enables us to learn about ourselves by listening to others. The experiences of others, both positive and negative, enrich us.
- In dialogue we strengthen our faith in the value of *being community*; we experience what it means to be "church."

Practical Pointers

- In sharing your thoughts try to speak briefly, keeping in mind that others also want to speak and that time is limited.
- In responding to or commenting on what someone else has said, try to begin by affirming a value or good point: "You are right in saying . . .; however, I see another side . . . ." There is always something true and good in what others say.
- Avoid giving pat answers or quick solutions to problems presented by a member of the cluster. It saves time and embarrassment to find out what has already been tried before suggesting a line of action.
- Do not minimize the pain, trouble, or anxiety a person may feel. Show empathy. When faced with a painful situation or crisis, suggest a moment of silent prayer before solutions are offered.
- The parent-leader is responsible to see that every member of the cluster has an opportunity to speak and to share insights; everyone in the group should share this responsibility.
- When someone speaks, it is a basic rule of politeness to give full attention to the person and to avoid making side remarks to someone else. Give signs that you are listening by an affirming nod, a smile and/or by asking a brief question to clarify the issue.
- Remember that body language speaks loud and clear!

Guides for Specific Theme Sessions

Rather than gather to talk about the negative aspects of family life, why not deepen awareness of the values and qualities which have proven effective in keeping the family together and growing in strength and happiness?

The following six themes are based on six characteristics identified in a national research project* as those which bond families together:

- Showing Appreciation
- Spending Time Together
- Good Communication
- Commitment to One Another
- Sharing Religious Values
- Facing Crisis Together

It is not enough simply to list these characteristics for discussion during the cluster meetings. The parents will appreciate some guidance to initiate dialogue.

This book includes pages with simple suggestions for conducting the meeting and some leading questions dealing with each of the six characteristics. Permission is granted to reproduce these pages for use within the school or parish community. It would be helpful to the members of the cluster to receive these guides in advance so they can come to the meeting prepared.

* Family Strengths Research Project, a study conducted under the supervision of Dr. Nick Stinnett, Chairman, Department of Human Development, University of Oklahoma. Reported in *The Family life Educator*, Spring/Summer, 1980, pp 1-2.

Appreciation

SHOWING APPRECIATION

Home Preparation

1. **Communication Experience**

The Host Family could prepare in advance for each member of the cluster a card with a sentence that expresses appreciation; for example, "I like the way you explain your thinking," "It always helps me to have your point of view," "Your courage is a real challenge to me," "I appreciate what you said," "You are right!" "Thank you for sharing your feelings," etc.

Or, the Host Family may prefer to give members of the cluster a blank card so they can write their favorite way of showing appreciation or gratitude.

Once the cards are written, they are placed face down on a tray. The tray is passed around; each one takes a card without showing it to others. Members are to find a way of using that sentence, or its equivalent in addressing someone in the Cluster during the course of the meeting.

Prayer

2. **Scripture Reading**

- Light a candle or vigil light.
- Ask someone to *read directly from the Bible*, Ephesians 4:11-16:

It is he who gave (his gifts that they should be) apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ, till we become one in faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, and form that perfect man who is Christ come to full stature.

Let us, then, be children no longer, tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine. . . . Rather, let us profess the truth in love and grow to the full maturity of Christ the head. Through him the whole body grows, and with the proper functioning of the members joined firmly together by each supporting ligament, builds itself up in love.

- Pause for two or three minutes of silent reflection.
- Invite spontaneous sharing of the meaning of the passage.

The passage mentions some of the roles Christ has given to His

people, each one receiving a different gift in order to fulfill these services. Which of the gifts do you see as most important? Why?
- What would happen if everybody had the same gift?
- Why is the variety of talents and gifts important in a family?

Dialogue

3. **Personal Experience**
- Recall someone who affirmed you in the past by showing appreciation of your gifts. What did that person say to you? How did you feel?
- What makes you feel "good" when you make an effort to please or serve your family? What sign of appreciation do you like to receive?
- When was the last time you showed appreciation of others in the family?
- Take a moment to show appreciation to God, thanking Him for His gifts to you and to other members of your family.

Family Experience
- How do parents expect their children to show appreciation?
- How can parents show appreciation of their children?

Action

4. **Conclusions and Resolutions**

Ask the parents to give examples of family situations—not necessarily their own—in which it is difficult to show appreciation. Get them started with a few situations, if needed, such as the following:

a) Grandma is weakening. She seems a bit senile at times. When a member of the family goes to visit her, all she does is complain. "Nobody cares for me. After all I did, nobody loves me."

b) Jim is 16, restless and awkward. He seems to enjoy upsetting others. He succeeds in getting on everybody's nerve, yet his peers like and admire him.

c) Dad arrives tired, preoccupied from work. He doesn't seem to listen when someone talks to him.

d) Mom was up all night with a sick child. She looks tired and is cross.

e) A wife dies. Taking flowers to the cemetery, the husband thinks, "I wish I had brought flowers home to her sometimes while she was alive. . . ."

f) A husband had a stroke and is half paralyzed. The wife wishes she had shown love and appreciation while he was still working hard.

- After each case, call for suggested ways to show appreciation.
- What kind of witness or example can parents give to their children in this respect?
- What word or sign of appreciation should you give NOW to someone at home? Write it down. Ask yourself if you did it during the week.

Summary

5. **To Summarize:**

Showing appreciation is a quality we all admire in others. When it permeates the relationships among members of a family, each member feels important, valued, and appreciated. No one is "taken for granted." Each one is recognized as a real gift of God to the family.

A compliment, a word of thanks, a sign of affection can go a long way to strengthen the bonds that unite a family and to give each member the courage to face the hardships of life.

Evaluation
- How did the meeting go?
- What are my personal feelings?

Prayer

6. Closing Prayer

- Ask someone to read directly from the Bible, Philippians 1:3-11.

I give thanks to my God every time I think of you—which is constantly, in every prayer I utter—rejoicing, as I plead on your behalf, at the way you have all continually helped promote the gospel from the very first day.

I am sure of this much: that he who has begun the good work in you will carry it through to completion, right up to the day of Christ Jesus. It is only right that I should entertain such expectations in your regard since I hold all of you dear—you who, to a person, are sharers of my gracious lot when I lie in prison or am summoned to defend the solid grounds on which the gospel rests. God himself can testify how much I long for each of you with the affection of Christ Jesus! My prayer is that your love may more and more abound, both in understanding and wealth of experience, so that with a clear conscience and blameless conduct you may learn to value the things that really matter, up to the very day of Christ. It is my wish that you may be found rich in the harvest of justice which Jesus Christ has ripened in you, to the glory and praise of God.

- Call for spontaneous prayers of petition.
- Decide the theme for sharing at the next meeting.
- Give each other a sign of friendship and appreciation.

Companionship

SPENDING TIME TOGETHER

Home Preparation

1. **Communication Experience**

As members of the cluster gather, the Host Family could direct them to a table where old newspapers and magazines are piled. Invite them to look through them and tear out a picture of a place they would like to be. When all have a dream-place in hand, ask them to sit in a circle.

Allow time for each one to explain the reason for his/her choice. A bit of day-dreaming is in order! It would be interesting to note how many have had the opportunity to be in their dream-place recently.

After each one shows his or her favorite place, ask the question, "Who would you like to have with you?"

It is good to have quiet moments when we are alone, but what would happen to us if we were left totally alone? if others avoided us?

Prayer

2. **Scripture Reading**

- Light a candle or vigil light.
- Ask someone to read directly from the Bible, Luke 10:38-42:

> On their journey Jesus entered a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him to her home. She had a sister named Mary, who seated herself at the Lord's feet and listened to his words. Martha, who was busy with all the details of hospitality, came to him and said, "Lord, are you not concerned that my sister has left me to do the household tasks all alone? Tell her to help me."
>
> The Lord in reply said to her: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and upset about many things; one thing only is required. Mary has chosen the better portion and she shall not be deprived of it."

- Pause for two or three minutes of silent reflection.

Invite members to share what this passage meant to them.

- How can we tell Jesus enjoyed spending time with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha?
- What are the ways each one "was with Jesus"? (contemplation - action)

- How can we "be with Jesus" during the day?
- How can we give witness that we believe He is with us, wherever we are?

Dialogue

3. **Personal Experience**
   - Recall the feelings of loneliness experienced as a youth. How did it feel? Who helped you overcome the emptiness?
   - When and where were the moments you appreciated companionship?
   - What type of companionship did you appreciate the most? (Silent? Active?)
   - Take a moment to thank God for the people who have meant the most to you.

   Family Experiences
   - What are the times your family usually spends together: meals? TV? sports? trips?
   - What are the most important moments in the life of a family when members ought to spend time together?
   - What ought to be the quality of these moments?
   - When was the last time that your family spent time together?

Action

4. **Conclusions and Resolutions**

   What would you suggest to a parent who usually says, "Not now, I am too busy," when a child or spouse asks for time.
   - Should children always receive *all* the time and attention they ask for?
   - What is the value of planning in the day's schedule some moments to be spent together?
   - Is it good to "waste" time together? What does this mean?
   - Think of some member of the family with whom you have not spent any time recently. What can you do about it? When will you do it?
   - As Christian parents, how can you witness to the importance of "being with" those who are in need—at home, in your neighborhood?

Summary

5. **To summarize:**

   There is great strength and happiness in families whose members place high value on doing things and spending time together. "Togetherness" should not be phony or artificial, but a real enjoyment which gives a sense of belonging and of security. The promise of Jesus to be in our midst when gathered together in His name is not limited to prayer groups. It has a special significance when, as a family, we spend time together, when we give each other the gift of our presence.

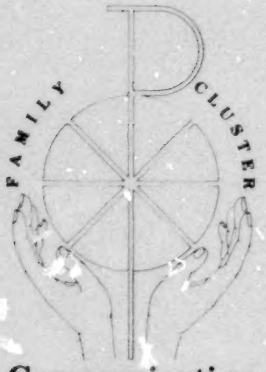
Evaluation

- How did the meeting go?
- What are my personal feelings?

Prayer

6. **Closing Prayer**
   - Read directly from Scripture, Matthew 18:20:

     Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst.
   - Invite spontaneous prayers of petition and of gratitude for the good times we have had with our family.
   - Select the time for the next meeting.
   - Give each other a sign of gratitude for the time spent together in the cluster.



Communication

GOOD COMMUNICATION

Home Preparation

1. **Communication Experience**

When all the members of the cluster are gathered, the Host Family organizes some parlor games that deal with communication. For example: Try to communicate a message or a need to the group without words, simply by using gestures. This could be done individually, or couples may want to play a charade or pantomime.

Provide paper and pencil. Ask each one to list the word and/or gesture he or she usually uses to express a) anger; b) sadness; c) need for quiet. Mix the papers. Read a few and try to guess who wrote them.

Find ways of expressing gratitude, love, or admiration for someone present by offering a symbolic gift.

Try other games as needed. Stimulate creativity and make it enjoyable.

Prayer

2. **Scripture Reading**

- Light a candle and read directly from Scripture, Colossians 3:12-17: Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. Christ's peace must reign in your hearts, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace. Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness. Let the word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you. In wisdom made perfect, instruct and admonish one another. Sing gratefully to God from your hearts in psalms, hymns, and inspired songs. Whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Give thanks to God the Father through him.
- Pause for two or three minutes of silent reflection.
- Initiate a sharing of what this passage means to each one.

The passage mentions compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience.

- How are these virtures needed for good communication at home?

- What does the passage say regarding quarrels?
- What kind of communication do we use when we teach and advise each other?

Dialogue

3. **Personal Experience**

Lack of communication is often at the basis of difficulties at home, in school, and in any social situation. Try to recall a time when as a child, youth, or young adult you found it difficult to communicate.

- What caused the difficulty? Did it come from you? from others? What did you do to restore communication?
- Who and/or what has helped you the most to communicate your feelings?
- Which is the easiest way for you to communicate: writing? gestures? signs or symbols?

Family Experience

- What are some of the most common obstacles to good communication between spouses? between parents and children?
- What could be done to establish better communication?
- What would be the value of having a set time when the members of a family are expected to talk together about mutual concern?
- What are some "family rituals" or traditions that express and communicate in a unique way our sentiments of praise, sorrow, petition, love, and gratitude?
- In the ordinary course of events, what have you found as an effective means of communication at home? (Distinguish between "information" and "sharing of feelings.")
- How can parents help their children realize the value of communication?
- What kind of witness or example can parents give to their children in this respect?

Action

4. **Conclusions and Resolutions**

- Take time to think of a person at home, at school, or in the parish with whom communication has been blocked. What can you do about it?
- As members of the same family, what can you do to improve communication at home? (List suggestions)
- As a cluster of Christian Families, what can we do to improve communication between ourselves and the parish? the school? other clusters?

Summary

5. **To Summarize:**

Good communication must flow back and forth. We must learn to share our feelings with honesty and to listen to others with attention and compassion. A great deal of mutual sensitivity is required for good communication, especially when conflict or fighting have taken place. It is crucial for a family to learn to recognize the needs, values, and hopes of each member and the ways they are usually expressed. This will help to deal with the real issues. It is also crucial that walls not be allowed to build around a member; without forcing anyone to communicate, make it very evident that "the door is always open to talk."

Evaluation

- How did the meeting go?
- What are my personal feelings?

Prayer

6. **Closing Prayer**

Prayer, our communication with God, has all the same elements as communication with one another. We praise God, we thank Him, we offer our petitions expressing our needs. We ask forgiveness and tell Him of our love. We also need His guidance to communicate to others the values of our faith, with tact and cheerfulness.

- Read directly from the Bible Colossians 4:2-6:
  Pray perseveringly, be attentive to prayer, and pray in a spirit of thanksgiving. Pray for us, too, that God may provide us with an opening to proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am a prisoner. Pray that I may speak it clearly, as I must. Be prudent in dealing with outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your speech be always gracious and in good taste, and strive to respond properly to all who address you.
- Invite spontaneous prayers reflecting some of these feelings.
- Decide on the theme to be discussed at the next meeting.
- Let members communicate by word of mouth and/or gesture their feelings of gratitude, and offer each other a sign of peace.

Commitment

COMMITMENT TO ONE ANOTHER

Home Preparation

1. **Communication Experience**

The Host Family should have ready a large sheet of paper taped on the wall or on a door. This paper should be divided into two broad columns, one entitled *Commitments* and the other *Requirements.*

When the members of the cluster are gathered, they could briefly brainstorm to surface different situations in which individuals make commitments. Include civic, religious, or school commitments; for example, Scouts' promises, marriage vows, Presidential Inauguration. As these are mentioned, the parent leader jots them on the paper in the Commitment column. After each example, record a key word or action from the promise or commitment ceremony

Now talk about qualities that are needed to make and to keep these commitments; for example, maturity, awareness of responsibilities, loyalty, fidelity, etc. Record the suggested qualities under Requirements. Continue the activity as long as it holds the interest of the group.

Prayer

2. **Scripture Reading**

- Light a candle; ask someone to read slowly from Scripture, Luke 9:23:

> Jesus said to all: "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps."

- Pause for two or three minutes of silent reflection.
- Initiate a spontaneous sharing of the meaning of the Scripture passage, pointing out that the celebration of the sacrament of Baptism and of Confirmation was, in fact, a celebration of our commitment to follow Christ. It takes time, however, to become aware and conscious of the meaning of this commitment.
- When did you realize that as a Christian you are committed to follow Christ?
- What is the meaning of "carrying our cross"?
- What does it mean to "follow Jesus"?

• In what way does commitment to others reflect our commitment to follow Christ?

Dialogue

3. **Personal Experience.**
Recall some solemn promises or commitments made in the past—as a child, youth, an adult.
• What sense of value and devotedness did this require?
• How did we feel when through neglect or anger we broke a promise or commitment?
• How did this affect others?
• How do we feel when someone breaks a promise or a commitment made to us?

Family Experience
Husband and wife make a commitment of loyalty, love and fidelity to one another; what are some of the signs of this commitment?
• Parents are commited to the love and education and care of their children. What are some of the signs of this commitment?
• How can children be trained to show their commitment to one another? (e.g., keeping family secrets, standing up for each other, showing pride and loyalty, offering service, being ready to make sacrifices for the good of others)
• What kind of example or witness about commitment can parents give to their children?

Action

4. **Conclusions and Resolutions**
• In what way can we strengthen the commitment we have made to each other at home?
• Take some time to jot down a resolution regarding change of attitude, a sign of reconciliation, or a sign of gratitude for the loyalty others have shown. This is private, but those who feel the need for it could share what they have in mind with the greatest of freedom.
• How can this commitment be reflected in our loyalty to the Church?
• What signs of commitment have we given to educate our children in Christian values?
• As Christians how do we keep our commitment to the members of God's family—especially the poor, the needy, the oppressed?

Summary

5. **To summarize**
The members of strong and happy families are committed to the welfare of one another. They feel that their first obligation is to fulfill the needs of their family. A sense of duty and loyalty permeates their bonds; they know they can count on each other, especially in difficult moments. Children growing in families where commitments and obligations are kept will discover the meaning and the value of belonging to God's family, the Church.

Evaluation

• How did the meeting go?
• What are my personal reactions or feelings?

Prayer

6. **Closing Prayer**
• Read directly from the Bible John 15:12-17.

> This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer speak of you as slaves, for a slave does not know what

his master is about. Instead, I call you friends, since I have made known to you all that I heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit. Your fruit must endure, so that all you ask the Father in my name he will give you. The command I give you is this, that you love one another.

- Invite spontaneous prayers of petition. Ask for the strength to be loyal and faithful to Christ and to one another. Pray for an understanding of what it means to "love one another as Christ has loved us."
- Select the topic for sharing at the next meeting.
- Use some of the words surfaced at the opening experience to renew a mutual commitment between members of a family and between families in the cluster.

Faith

SHARING RELIGIOUS VALUES

Home Preparation

1. **Communication Experience**

The Host Family should have ready and available a variety of "art" material such as colorful pieces of paper or cloth, pipe cleaners, yarn, markers, scissors, etc. As the members of the cluster gather, invite them to select and use the material to make a religious symbol. They may cut out or shape or draw anything that reminds them of a personal religious experience or gives them a sense of special devotion. They could wear it for all to see.

Everyone should feel great freedom in doing this. It may be that a member does not want to make a religious symbol. In any case, the experience should initiate member sharing about the reason for the choice and what meaning that particular symbol has in his/her life. Members may wish to tell why they do or do not like to wear religious symbols.

Prayer

2. **Scripture reading**

- Light a candle or vigil light.
- Pass around a small container of Holy Water.
- Read directly from Matthew, 5:1-2, 13-16:

When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountainside. After he had sat down his disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them:

"You are the salt of the earth. But what if salt goes flat? How can you restore its flavor? Then it is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. People do not light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket. They set it on a stand where it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, your light must shine before men so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to your heavenly Father."

- Pause a few minutes for silent reflection.
- Initiate sharing about the meaning of the passage: Which symbol used by Jesus impressed you the most: being "*salt*," called to bring out

the flavor of ordinary life by highlighting its religious dimensions? or being "*light*," showing the way to God?

• How do you think parents are "salt" and "light" at home?

Dialogue

3. **Personal Experience**

• Recall a time in childhood or youth which stands out as "critical," a time of decision, a turning point, a crisis.

• What religious value or custom helped you the most at that time? (For instance, a favorite Scripture text, family prayer, the Rosary, some devotion, Mass, Confession, the ability to talk about faith and religious matters, trust in God)

• What religious practice or form of prayer turned you off? Why?

• Who most helped you to discover the value of religion in your life?

Take a moment to thank God for your own discovery of religious values.

Family Experience

As parents or family members share their experiences, it is important to record what they say since this can serve as a motivation to other parents.

• What external signs of faith should children see at home? (Crucifix, Bible, medals, Holy Water, holy pictures, religious books and magazines, religious TV programs, parents praying, etc.)

• What external customs or practices do you have at home? (Blessing children when they go to bed or leave the house, blessing before meals, family prayer, helping with religious instructions, mutual forgiveness, religious dimension of Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, family feast day, etc.)

• How do we deal with children, teenagers, or other members of the family who are not "religious" and resist praying or going to Mass?

• When parents have received a different training or come from a culture which their children have not experienced, there is usually conflict in "religiosity." How can the religious practices of ethnic groups be made "valid" in the parish or school the children attend? (For example, Posadas, special Patron Saints, Feasts of Our Lady)

• What signs of faith do you see in your children?

• In your experience, what do you see most helpful to your children in strengthening their faith.

• What dangers do you see which undermine their faith in God and the Church?

Action

4. **Conclusions and Resolutions**

In view of the sharing, what practical and concrete ideas do we have?

• How do parents witness their faith to their children?

• As a cluster, what can we do to be "salt" and "light" in our parish? (For example, plan a prayer day, invite the children to join the group for closing prayer, Scripture reading, etc.)

Summary

5. **To summarize:**

When the members of a family share the same religious values, they are bonded together in a very special way. Together they give witness to the reality of God's presence in their lives—a presence made visible in many and varied ways. When faced with important decisions,

conflict, or even tragedy, these families are able to transcend the limits of their own strength. These families are an asset in any parish and school; they are the leaven of the Christian community.

Evaluation

- How did the meeting go?
- What are my feelings and reactions?

Prayer

6. **Closing Prayer**
   - Read directly from Matthew 7:7-11:

     "Ask and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For the one who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds. The one who knocks, enters. Would one of you hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf, or a poisonous snake when he asks for a fish? If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to anyone who asks him!"
   - Call for spontaneous prayers of petition.
   - Select the theme for the next meeting.
   - Exchange with each other the religious symbol made as a sign of peace and friendship.

Loyalty

FACING CRISIS TOGETHER

Home Preparation

1. **Communication Experience**

In preparation for the meeting the Host Family should have available a stack of newspapers, tape, and scissors as well as a large sheet of paper to which the clippings can be attached.

When the cluster members are gathered, they are invited to look through the newspapers and cut out headlines or accounts of tragedies or crises that for some particular reason affect them personally or resemble a crisis their own family faced in the past.

The clippings are then posted, and in turn each member of the group explains to the others the reason for the choice and what experience in his/her own life parallels it.

Prayer

2. **Scripture reading**

- Light a candle. Draw attention to the variety of crises that could and in fact do affect us. The leader may comment, "At a time of crisis we do not always know what to do or what to pray for. We are confused and feel our weakness."
- Read directly from Scripture Romans 8:26-27:

> The Spirit too helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in speech. He who searches hearts knows what the Spirit means, for the Spirit intercedes for the saints as God himself wills.

- Pause for a few minutes of silent reflection.
- Initiate a sharing of the meaning of this passage:

All of us have experienced crisis in our life.

- Have you ever felt that God was not listening to your prayer?
- What does this letter to the Romans tell us about prayer?

Dialogue

3. **Personal Experience**

- Ask for volunteers to share with the cluster a personal crisis they may have gone through as a child, youth, or in recent years.
- How was that crisis faced? Who helped?
- What value is there in facing a crisis with someone who cares?

• Take a moment to thank God for some crisis in life which helped us to mature and to be more understanding of others.

Family Experience

• What are some of the "normal" crises families like ours go through?

• What value do we see in these crises—for ourselves? for our children?

• What are some ways of facing crises together at home?

As members give suggestions, it is important to list them. Some examples: taking time to talk things over; listening to both sides; praying together for strength to face the situation; staying close to the person(s); giving signs of trust, understanding, compassion, etc.

• Who is a trusted person within or outside the family to whom you can turn in case of crisis?

• What can parents say to a teenager undergoing a crisis who says, "You don't understand. Leave me alone."

• What can children do to help parents who are going through a crisis?

• Is it true that children "do not understand"?

• What are some signs people give to indicate they need help—even if they deny it? What can be done in these cases?

Action

4. **Conclusions and Resolutions**

• Check if you yourself know how to seek help in a time of crisis.

• Check if you know how to listen and try to understand when others are going through a crisis. Jot down what you think you should do. Share these resolutions spontaneously and very freely. The sharing may give courage to someone else in the same situation.

• How can parents witness to their children that prayer is always powerful and that God does listen and answer it?

Summary

5. **To summarize:**

The ability to deal with problems and crises in a constructive way is a quality all families should strive to develop. Very often the facing of a problem or crisis together is a source of renewed unity and awareness of how much we need one another.

Evaluation

• How did the meeting go?

• What are my personal reactions or feeling?

Prayer

6. **Closing Prayer**

• Read directly from Scripture, Romans 8:22-25:

> Yes, we know that all creation groans and is in agony even until now. Not only that, but we ourselves, although we have the Spirit as first fruits, groan inwardly while we await the redemption of our bodies. In hope we were saved. But hope is not hope if its object is seen; how is it possible for one to hope for what he sees? And hoping for what we cannot see means awaiting it with patient endurance.

• Invite prayers of petition asking for patience, faith, and trust in time of crisis. Mention concrete needs of cluster family members or of other families undergoing a crisis.

• Select the topic for the next meeting.

III. PARENT AS WITNESS

Toward More Effective Morale, Motivation, and Modeling

by Dr. Richard Corrado

Among the several contemporary cultural and religious factors confronting the efforts for effective catechesis in the United States, none impacts our lives across a broader spectrum than the current status of the family. The progressive fragmentation, isolation, and structural changes of the family in the United States in the past quarter-century have clearly underlined the fact that the members of many families need extensive support if they are to grow in faith and live according to the example of Christ and the teaching of His Church. For the many who do not look upon the family as an "over-the-hill" institution, the witness factor of parents looms as a key element in offering much of the support all family members need.

Witness by definition speaks out of first-hand experience, so the author's perspective is primarily that of a husband and father. Yet the thoughts and reflections expressed have also been much affected by some of the thousands of healthy, effective families it's been a privilege and joy to serve with for nearly 25 years of service in the Church. The thoughts, then, are not primarily the result of research done but the sharing of life lived and observed.

A most succinct, yet truly comprehensive, summary of a parent's call to witness is found in a single sentence which Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "Do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). The Apostle, in effect, summarizes God's direction for parents as witnesses under the aspect of three basic commands: *to love, to discipline,* and *to teach*. For our purposes in this chapter, *love* calls for building family *morale*—feeling good about who you are, what you do, and where you do it. *Discipline* translates into effective *motivation* lived out, and *teaching*—or what is taught—results from parent *modeling* behavior.

Building Morale

It never ceases to be exciting to observe the family as *a place to grow people*. The balanced environment designed by God is surely the singular opportunity for parents to express love in the growth of those human beings entrusted to them. Have you noticed recently how body development, mind growth, or social or spiritual maturity in the young can be so directly related to the growth and development of that environment we call family?

As parents, we can witness with all our striven power to make our homes the center of the child's happiness and of pleasant recollections for an entire lifetime. Sometimes, I believe, children are forced to display negative behavior—at all ages—so as to be noticed. As parents, we seem to be more quickly aroused by negative behavior than by positive. Children have innate skills developing from birth to tell us how they desire the companionship of us as parents, just to *be* together. Playing

games together, taking a trip, watching a good television program together, or reading a story and discussing either afterwards, praying together . . . and really *listening* when your child tells you something. There are so many ways to let your child know you love him or her as you build family morale. It takes a little time, that's all. You put down the newspaper, or make that phone call *after* the children are in bed, or even *cancel* that "very important" meeting or social event. Children don't need priority in all things; but neither can their needs finish second regularly.

Through the years, one of the aspects of this dimension of parent witnessing that keeps surfacing as critical in expressing love/morale building toward our children is *time*. We can love our children without spending great sums of money, without elaborate preparations, and without a lot of paraphernalia. But we cannot express our love without *spending time* at it. From spending time together to spending time alone with each child, we serve God's will in our children's *morale growth and development*.

To give time to your children does not mean that you must always place yourself at their disposal and enter into all of their activities, although one may surely do so on occasion. What is equally effective—and usually more exciting for the child—is to be included in some activity of the parent. My father liked to take short trips—from going to the post office, to the newspaper store, to an ice pond in the winter, to the mountains—and we'd spend hours together following his "Want to come along?" We did not get the feeling that he was now going into a belabored process of "spending time with the children." He was just doing something he liked, and included us in it.

There is little doubt that the family provides the center for the development of *creativity*. Who you are as a growing person is "witnessed" to through a support system in the home that develops *self-trust* and *personal confidence*. Sometimes the discipline we experience (which we'll address more fully later) is key in *freeing* the child up in his/her relationships with others. And, finally, the efforts we make as parent witnesses can develop in each child an understanding and appreciation of his/her unique, individual gifts and personal interests.

Perhaps in building the home environment which promotes both a sense of safety and security for the child, we also contribute heavily as "witness" to transmitting those values which clearly establish our personal and collective relationship with Christ. The intimacy shared as family serves naturally as a linkage point with the intimacy of our developing relationships with the Father through His Son.

With all that we do in terms of expressing our love within the context of *building morale*, an indispensable ingredient for successful family living is certainly a sense of humor. To witness to our limitations through laughter often sets many things in perspective. We can become so engrossed in the details and trials of family life that regular touches of humor are necessary just to allow us to see ourselves and our circumstances from a new point of view.

These reflections are surely not normative nor exhaustive; hopefully, they illustrate the fact that expressing love in *morale building* in a

family is made up of many little things. It can be a moment shared, a hug-on-the-run, a ride in the country, a day at the beach, a conversation at the dinner table, a compliment on the new boyfriend, praying for a better day in school tomorrow, putting aside a newspaper or a magazine to listen, ruffling up one's hair, holding a hand, or wiping away a tear. Witnessing as parent in providing the good morale-environment of our home is an awesome responsibility. That is why God has offered some clear instructions through Paul and others to help us do the job.

Developing Motivation

In attempting to witness for effective parenting in the area of discipline, guidance through *motivation* provides a very strong foundation. Each child comes into the world with "sealed orders"—a unique destiny in life to fill. Our calling, it seems, is to help the child to unseal the orders so as to discover what it is that God means him/her to be and to do. In that sense, we are clearly to be held accountable for the "discipline" of our children.

How does motivation develop as an expression of witness? First is the understanding that wanting what is best for others—whatever the cost is to ourselves—provides the level of parent vulnerability to which God calls us in motivating our children. Secondly, we might consider three elements as structural guidelines for our course of action:

1. expose our children to as many experiences as possible;
2. resist the temptation to decide for our children what their vocation will be; and,
3. realize how much help our children need in separating the truly successful life from the mere making of money.

In helping our children move from points of dependency to positions of independence, we know that the support we offer must be individualized and directed toward self-discipline. Both the internal and external stimuli—reward and punishment, goal setting, performance, recognition of limitations, effort, persistence, and resilience—afforded by parents for children through several stages of growth communicate family values. And that type of witnessing contributes immeasurably to the tripartite approach: to inform, form, and transform the motivational insights of the child in his/her personal faith commitment to Christ.

The experience of many families shared in school/home settings time and time again emphasize that an atmosphere most conducive to successful motivation is one in which "freedom" and "dialogue" prevail. "Freedom" is the child's experience of growth through discipline which builds upon positive values and constructive behavior rather than a negative "put down" set. While a "pat-on-the-back" is physically only 18-24 inches removed from another form of external stimulus, we know its effects are often more enduring and fulfilling in terms of motivation. This is not to suggest that firmness, even in the form of physical admonition, is a "no-no." To the contrary, as witness to effective discipline through judicious motivation, parents have attested to a clear need for occasional "woodshed therapy." "Dialogue" is the skill to go beyond the words of another and beneath one's feelings to listen to the heart of the other person—the ultimate in listening.

The guidelines, of course, center around the elements of consistency. There must not be harshness at one time and then indulgence at another, in the same case. It must be proportioned to the importance of the fault. As Christians, we live under the discipline of Christ. He disciplines us severely as often as we need it. His object, as surely as ours is with children, is not to spare us pain, but to teach us to slay the will of the flesh. He disciplines/motivates us with moderation. He does not afflict us deliberately; and as He observes us acknowledging our faults, He comes to us with consolation and kindness. So He deals with us, and so we ought to witness to our children.

In learning both the severity and the kindness of true discipline through motivation, the parent as witness must develop what I've come to call the P.U.L.S.E skills. Most parents, in keeping touch with the pulse of situations involving their children, come to identify *P*atience, *U*nderstanding, *L*istening, *S*haring, and *E*nabling as important skills to develop. We have said something about or alluded to the first four; now a word about *enabling*.

Enabling is that element in motivation which allows one person to relate even more effectively following a confrontation. Have you ever said to yourself, "I don't care if he/she goes away mad—as long as he/she goes away"? *Enabling* is any form of action—word, phrase, idea, suggestion—that minimizes or precludes the other person "going away mad." For most of us, the children we live with today are the same ones that will be there tomorrow—so learning to *enable* holds promise for a better tomorrow.

Teaching through Modeling

Our families have rarely had a better environment and setting to witness for Christ than they have today. That is not to suggest that it is the *easiest* setting. On the contrary, it is one of the most difficult which history has offered the parent in which to witness. But for that very reason, the opportunity is unparalleled.

Not only do our children learn more effectively from what we do and who we are in behavior we model, but so do others. While a spoken testimony for Christ has its distinct place and purpose in God's plan, we live in a society and at a time when people have become wary of mere words. Consequently, when we witness as parents by modeling behaviors which are working in our family to promote change for the better in each person's life, others take notice and become interested. While our witness in teaching through the behaviors we model will depend on many things, there is a key, and that key is *faith*. In an effort to become effective parent-witnesses, the first realization is that we don't *decide* to be witnesses; rather we accept the instrumentality which God offers to us to serve as witnesses to our children and others. We must believe that God is as interested in this project—parent as witness—as we are. We must confidently expect Him to reveal and share Himself in our family, and thus make us His witness. It is that very expectation which allows Him to come in and transform our family life. In our families, no less than in our individual lives, God's action in our behalf is "according to your *faith* be it done to you." (Matthew 9:29)

Developing Christian family life, therefore, is not merely a simple human possibility forged from putting our mind and will to it. It only becomes possible, especially in terms of the behaviors we model to teach others, as we grow in seeing that God is in charge of our families. This starts with practicing the "V," *vulnerability*, aspect of the RFV Quotient developed over many years in our own family (taking *Risk*, taking the resultant *Flak*, being *Vulnerable*). To admit *need* is really a first step in acquiring faith development and surely we'd all agree that family life does stand in need of help. Even the eloquent brevity of "Help!" is a prayer of witness that's hard to improve on.

Once we admit need, a step follows in which we witness to the acceptance of help which is offered. Some call it "surrender"; others might offer "Let God take charge." Peter, writing to Christians in his day, put it this way: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." (I Peter 5:6) We witness well when our private wills and hopes and plans and opinions are given over to providential presence.

Assuming that we're willing to model behaviors in our family in which we witness to recognizing the need for help, seek the help, and surrender our family life to God—how does God take charge, in terms of practical results? The Apostle Peter has offered us a rather unique suggestion with which, I believe, all parents can identify as we grapple with witnessing. Peter suggests that God is willing to take charge of our sense of personal *worth*, our seeking of personal identity; He takes charge of our *worries*, the practical problems that press in on us in everyday life; and, He takes charge of our *warfare*, the spiritual struggle each of us faces. These three concerns, considered together, demonstrate a comprehensiveness of His care for those who surrender to his call to witness.

Children who are raised in a family environment with this kind of an ideal striven for surely may not always find it easy to live by. The examples we give—often for which the reward may be ridicule and/or rejection—serve well to support family members in crises. And beyond, of course, lies the promise for the faithful witness: "In time, He will exalt you." This is what teaching by modeling for Christian parent witnessing is really all about—living by and through a power beyond ourselves. The parents who strive toward more effective morale, motivation, and modeling build their lives and that of their family upon faith. The Lord to whom the family's life and words witness is the Lord with whom one day they will share family-life everlasting.

IV. HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION
Ideas and Activities

1. Design a brochure giving pertinent information that would interest readers. Include pictures of activities, more spiritual than athletic. Have members of the School Welcome Committee give this brochure to new families as they move into the parish.

2. Design a school logo. Prepare school announcements or brief reports of activities for the Parish Bulletin as frequently as possible. Always use the school logo so that the news is easily spotted.

3. For about $70.00 a year, you can send 200 copies each month (bulk rate) of school news to parents, board members, businesses and parents of potential students. Keep the articles brief but interesting. Include graphics to break the solid print.

4. Have principal and teachers call three homes weekly to share with parents the good news of the growth and development of their children. Relate specific happenings. Thank parents for their support and cooperation.

5. In your regular Parent Bulletin, feature one family in each issue. Early in the year send home data sheets to gather information for this purpose. Include both factual information as well as hopes and dreams parents hold for their children and their school.

6. Some evening early in the school year hold a mini-school day for parents, offering them the opportunity to get a sense of the school day as well as allowing teachers to share objectives, syllabi, etc. Allow time for discussion and comments. End with a social hour.

7. In late fall invite parents of prospective school children for first grade and/or kindergarten to visit the school with their pre-schoolers. Ask a host class to involve the children in work, stories, and skits for about an hour. Provide coffee and a nutritious snack; discuss and answer questions.

8. Present certificates of recognition to parents. The award could be for years of service, special contributions, serving as school officers, etc. The presentation should take place at some school/church function.

9. Invite several parents to participate in lunch once every two weeks. Have a teacher and several students join them. Share with them some interesting things about the school.

10. Conduct a coffee tour. Send invitations monthly to twelve parishioners to visit the school. By means of transparencies or slides, introduce the faculty and explain the school programs and activities. Then conduct a tour of the school, concluding with coffee as an opportunity to gather impressions and to answer questions.

11. Get the names and dates of those to be baptized about two weeks in advance. Recognize the newly baptized by a card, phone call, or visit on the baptismal day to welcome him/her to God's family. Students might want to make a poster for this occasion and present it to the parents.

12. Have graduates:
    a. invite all parishioners to attend their graduation exercises;
    b. thank all parishioners for having provided them the opportunity for a Catholic education;
    c. prepare a "Thank You" bulletin board in the church.

13. Hold a Senior Citizens Day periodically. Invite the senior citizens to a liturgy or to a luncheon to honor them. Make them feel special since they are supporters of the school.

14. Gather information about past graduates, what they are doing, where they are located, etc. Then from time to time, feature a few of the alumni on the church bulletin board. Pictures make this news corner more attractive.

15. Have a picnic in the gym. Parents are invited to bring a bag lunch and a blanket and to eat with their children. In colder climates, winter is a good time.

16. During Advent, cut out a large paper Christmas tree and hang on the corridor wall. Cut out colored paper circles and print the name of each family on a ball. Throughout Advent, family names are drawn, the children pray for those families, and the balls are glued to the tree.

V. RECOMMITMENT SERVICE

Introduction

LEADER: Catholic Schools are unique expressions of the Church's effort to achieve the purposes of Catholic education among the young. In Catholic Schools children and young people can experience learning and living fully integrated lives in the light of faith because such schools strive to relate all human culture eventually to the news of salvation, so that the life of faith will illumine the knowledge which students gradually gain of the world, of life and of mankind. (from *Sharing the Light of Faith*)

As our American flag and our Church flag are brought forward, let us together sing to the God who has called us to be His faithful ones.

ALL SING: Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow

READER: Let us now listen as the word of God is proclaimed Mark 9:35-37

RESPONSE: Silent reflection on reading. An appropriate song might be played quietly in the background. E.g., Earthen Vessels, Foley, S.J.; Isaiah 49, Landry; Miracle of Life, Ron Ellis; Father of Peace, B. Lynch; from Glory and Praise Vol. I & II.

LEADER: You, the parents and primary educators of children, witness your belief in the value of Catholic schools by promoting, supporting and maintaining the Catholic school tradition. Now as a sign of your commitment to Catholic schools let us together recite the Parents' Creed.

PARENTS' CREED

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty
Maker of heaven and earth,
And Jesus, His only Son,
Begotten from all eternity
Who, through the power of the Spirit,
Was born of a virgin and came to be with us,
A Jesus who loved and cherished children.
I believe that this same Lord Jesus
is present among us, proclaiming the Good News—
to His children and to us;
That He has died, He is risen, and *has* come again.

I believe and accept the responsibility of proclaiming that same good news—especially to my children.
I acknowledge and proclaim that I as a parent am the first and primary educator of my children—but not the only one.

I believe that Jesus has entrusted these children to me, to love them, to nurture and sustain them, for the building of His kingdom.

Because I believe so firmly in His word, I share that same word with those dedicated Christians who have made a commitment to the building of His kingdom, that is, Catholic educators.

I entrust to these educators what is most precious to me—my children. I commission them to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to my children—by their words, their examples, and their very lives.

I pray that the Spirit of Jesus will fill their being, so that the Good News of the kingdom of God, proclaimed by the prophets, will be proclaimed in their lives.

I believe in the Catholic School.
I believe it is a sign of hope, that it gives witness to that same hope, and that through this same hope, the resurrection of Jesus Christ will become a reality in our lives and the lives of our children.

Amen

(by Sr. Joan Sullivan, SSJ)

BLESSING: (Parents hold out hands, palms up, to receive the blessing)

L: May your faith and the faith of your children be continually nourished and enriched

AMEN

L: May God our Father's immeasurable love for you give you renewed strength and confidence to witness His truths

AMEN

L: May you be empowered by the Holy Spirit to breathe the spirit of peace and courage on your children

AMEN

L: May Jesus the Son of Justice deepen your desire to create a world of justice and peace for all

AMEN

L: May you always rejoice in the present, give thanks for the past, and look with hope to the future

AMEN

LEADER: Let us conclude our service by reciting the prayer Christ taught us:
OUR FATHER . . .

VI. REPRODUCIBLE ART

These pages are provided so that custom-designed announcements can be prepared. For your convenience, sample formats for brochures are suggested for adaptation, duplication, and distribution on your local level.

Parent as Witness
A Recommitment Service for Parents
A Special Message for Parents
Christian Family Clusters
Consider . . .
Parent-to-Parent Ministry

Parent as Witness
A Recommitment Service for Parents
A Special Message for Parents
Christian Family Clusters
Consider . . .
Parent-to-Parent Ministry

Cluster Meeting #1	**Showing Appreciation**
Cluster Meeting #2	**Spending Time Together**
Cluster Meeting #3	**Good Communication**
Cluster Meeting #4	**Commitment to One Another**
Cluster Meeting #5	**Sharing Religious Values**
Cluster Meeting #6	**Facing Crisis Together**

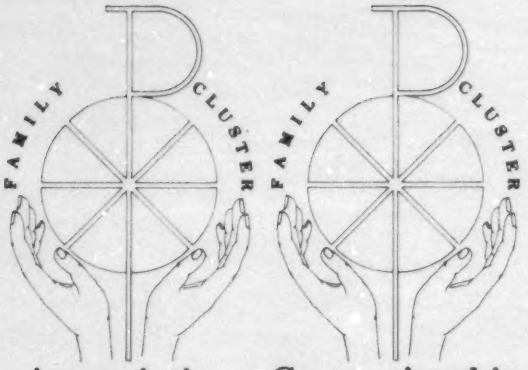
Aim of Christian Family Clusters

Christian Family Clusters aim

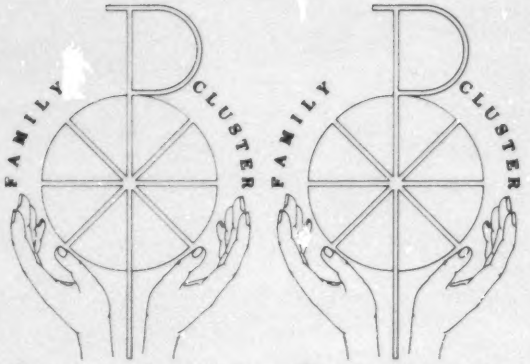
1. to open new possibilities for parents to help one another within small gatherings
2. to deepen members' own faith and give witness to it
3. to find new ways of creating a Christian environment at home
4. to give mutual support in the Christian education of their children
5. to stimulate in themselves and in their children genuine growth in human and Christian maturity

Six Themes

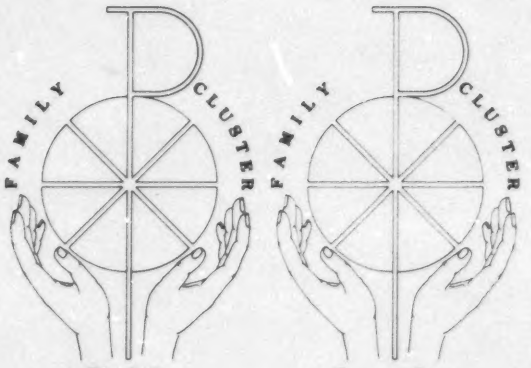
1. Showing Appreciation
2. Spending Time Together
3. Good Communication
4. Commitment to One Another
5. Sharing Religious Values
6. Facing Crisis Together



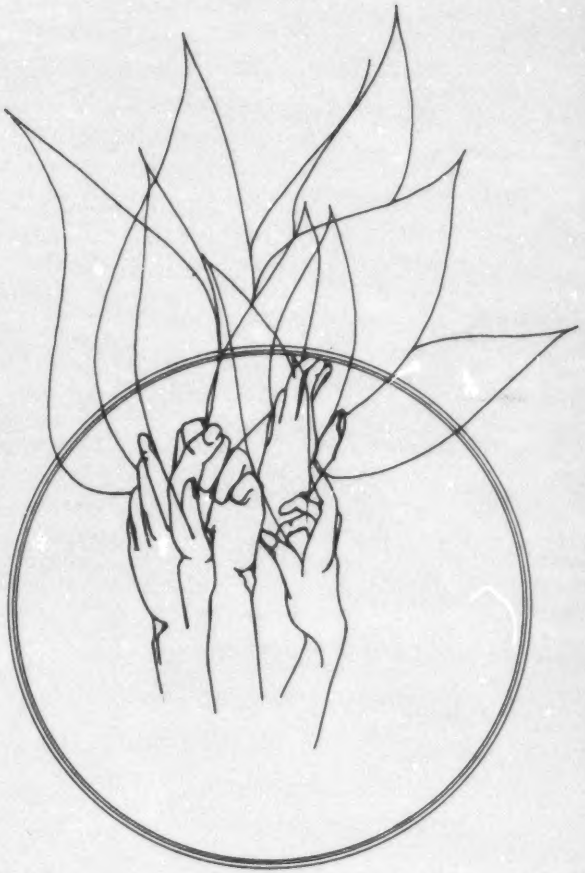
Appreciation **Companionship**



Communication **Commitment**



Faith **Loyalty**



PARENT as WITNESS

WHY PARENTS CHOOSE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

BUILD ON HOME VALUES

CHRISTIAN WITNESS

CHRIST-CENTERED

GOSPEL VALUES

DISCIPLINE

LOVE

RELIGION

DEDICATED TEACHERS

HOPE

DISCIPLESHIP

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

FAITH COMMUNITY

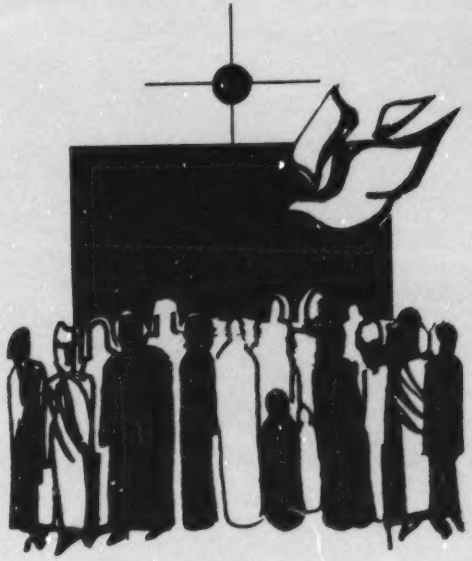
CONCERN

TOTAL EDUCATION

CARING

PRAYER

COMMITTED PARENTS



PARENT as WITNESS

PARENT AS WITNESS

The concept of parent as witness is one which expresses the parental call to share Christian life with their children. The future of the Church lies in the homes of today's children—in the hands of their parents. Children receive the message of the Gospel as parents communicate it through their daily lives.

Parents witness to their children when they share with them the experience of their faith—how it has given them life filled with hope and peace. Within this faith life, children grow also as they share the sorrows and disappointments of their parents. They need to know what God means personally to their parent or parents.

The goal of the Catholic school is to enhance what a child has already received at home. The school tries to build on the faith experiences that children bring with them. Together the home and school can bring children to the realization that Jesus Christ is the Person who really counts in their lives.

PARENT'S CREED

I believe in One God, the Father Almighty
Maker of heaven and earth,
And Jesus, His only Son,
Begotten from all eternity
Who, through the power of the Spirit,
Was born of a virgin and came to be with us.

I believe that this same Lord Jesus
is present among us, proclaiming the Good
News—to His children and to us;
That He has died, He is risen, and *has* come again.

I believe and accept the responsibility of proclaiming that same good news—especially to my children.

I acknowledge and proclaim that I as a parent am the first and primary educator of my children—but not the only one.

I believe that Jesus has entrusted these children to me, to love them, to nurture and sustain them, for the building of His kingdom.

Because I believe so firmly in His word, I share that same word with those dedicated Christians who have made a commitment to the building of His kingdom, that is, Catholic educators.

I entrust to these educators what is most precious to me—my children. I commission them to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to my children—by their words, their examples, and their very lives.

I pray that the Spirit of Jesus will fill their being, so that the Good News of the kingdom of God, proclaimed by the prophets, will be proclaimed in their lives.

I believe in the Catholic School.
I believe it is a sign of hope, that it gives witness to that same hope, and that through this same hope, the resurrection of Jesus Christ will become a reality in our lives and the lives of our children.

Amen

(by Sr. Joan Sullivan, SSJ)

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

New Testament:

Matt. 19:13-14
Mark 5:21-23
Eph. 6:1-4
Heb. 11:20-21
Cor. 12:14-15
Col. 3:20-21

Old Testament:

Deut. 11:18-21 & 4:9-10
Ps. 78:4
Gen. 48:15-16
Job 42:12-15
Pro. 13:24 & 19:18 & 23:13-14

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Sharing The Light of Faith, National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the U.S., 1979.

Teach Them, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1976.